Discourses We Live By
Narratives of Educational and Social Endeavour

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Marta Zientek offers a rhetorical exposition of the political system in Poland, and shows how an adult education course provided a space to analyse and reflect on the veracity of the messages put out by the dominant governing party. Course members critically examined the speeches of a political leader to see how linguistic devices were employed to attract public support.

This chapter reports on a Polish research project that seeks to understand the processes that underpin the formation of a national identity. This is timely. When a country is experiencing broad social change and political unrest, interest in such matters is prominent; incidents awaiting investigation abound in both the media and society. The project adopts a Participatory Action Research (PAR) methodology and this enabled me to work with a group of fifty adult learners who enrolled on a political discourse course at a Polish university. The course, based within an English Philology department, was led by tutors and/or enrolled students who have a background in linguistic and speech communication; studies that equip them to analyse texts for their overt and more covert meanings. Thus, a collective decision was made to use Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (Fairclough, 1993)
to examine discursive constructions of meaning and the social biases embedded in politicians’ language — written and spoken. CDA was used in tandem with Foucault’s writings to keep notions of power clearly in mind throughout. The students’ engagement with CDA was thorough and, seemingly, for life. Foucault aroused their interest mainly because his name is appropriated (as well as misappropriated) by the world of political discourse studies. Their university course — of a year’s duration — provided students with a safe space in which to do their analyses in a supported educational context, an idea informed by an earlier action research course established by academics in Sussex, England (Pettit, 2010).

Before looking further at the actual research and its findings, I present an overview of the contemporary Polish political context and its social manifestations to enable the reader to better understand the significance and relevance of this PAR project. This is followed by a discussion and partial application of Foucault’s discourses on power, before the chapter addresses the methodological frameworks in more detail to show why CDA, PAR, Frames of Reference (FoR) and Metaphorical Analysis (MetA) offered an appropriate framework. The research process is described, and its outcomes are discussed in general terms before four specific examples of political text analysis are presented to demonstrate the nature of the course activity and how the frameworks were applied to actual political messages found in the media.

The Research Context

The Political Situation in Poland

Poland has undergone many changes since the political elections in 2015 when the far-right populist Polish Law and Justice Party (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość, PiS) won both the presidential and parliamentary elections (Lachaise, 2017). PiS was founded in 2001 by twin brothers, Jarosław and Lech Kaczyński (Marcinkiewicz & Stegmaier, 2017). It is closely aligned with powerful Catholic fundamentalists who provide the party with a broad and stable base of electoral support, and whose members campaigned with a promise to crack down on corruption and crime (Marcinkiewicz & Stegmaier, 2017). The Law and Justice Party
won overwhelming support from a large number of Poles, as it offered a rudimentary welfare system and a vision of a large and powerful state (Adekoya, 2017), but for both the elite and the inhabitants of Poland’s larger and more developed cities, the election result came as a shock. Supporters of the more liberal Committee for the Defence of Democracy (Komitet Obrony Demokracji, KOD) organize regular public protests that were, and are, attended by thousands of citizens (Lachaise, 2017), but to little effect.

Despite these protests and significant international pressure (Lachaise, 2017), the PiS leader has steadily passed laws to reform education, the labour market and the judiciary, which some believe to be eroding Poland’s democratic system of government, sometimes challenging the constitution (Wiewiora, 2018). Such actions are said to have created a ‘rupture in society’ (Hachaud, 2017); a state of ‘political crisis’ (Lachaise, 2017) that is subject to ‘blatant manipulation’ in the press (Lachaise, 2017).

Although Polish people continue to be pro-EU, PiS offers a different vision of what this means, one that is White, Catholic and traditional (Adekoya, 2017). This less progressive stance is not acceptable to all nationals and some have chosen to leave the country and settle elsewhere. But for others, often the less educated, the communitarian approach that PiS deploys provides a sense of security, being both ‘emotionally reassuring’ and financially beneficial (Adekoya, 2017). The President, Andrzej Duda, is described as ‘young, charismatic, media savvy, and unashamed of allowing his faith’ (Mazurczak, 2015) and many Polish citizens find these qualities attractive.

The Contemporary Scene

In contemporary Poland there are many social agents who reject the biases and symbolic power evident in the daily newspapers and TV interviews. Currently, many Polish citizens are motivated to analyse political speeches and media interviews with politicians in order to be better informed and more able to voice their objections to issues they don’t agree with. Some seek to challenge the propaganda that all positive social changes stem from the PiS and any economic problems arise from the activities of their political opponents when in power.
during the previous seven years of governance. Indeed, rumours and claims of wrongdoing are commonplace (see Lachaise, 2017).

As ever, adult education offers opportunities to become better informed, but many adult learners face problems when they try to put down roots within the space of the ‘new and only’ right-wing political discourse, presented by the PiS. They have no platform from which to voice their opinions, and the course referred to in this chapter compensates for this in some small part as it enabled adult learners to examine some of the processes by which those in power maintain their following, and to question the metaphorical, and, in their view, often oppressive language used in public gatherings and the media.

Polish Political Discourse: A Foucauldian Analysis

In Foucauldian terms, discourse is presented not only as utterances but also as ways of thinking and sense-making, shaping human actions under given circumstances, interplays and interrelations among discourse actors and, finally, describing the acts and results of arranging signs and material objects (Foucault, 1977). Moreover, discourses can be treated as practices; the discourse-practitioners’ customs, which exclude or include political opponents, render some ideas important and others invisible and meaningless (Foucault, 2003). What is more, discourses create and re-create knowledge and power simultaneously. Their effects are spread through the actions of different members of the community who share common ways of thinking, doing and being.

The discursive practice within a discourse community can be seen as normative, formulating ‘truths’ about what is appropriate thought, speech or action and devaluing the ways of thinking held by those who challenge these values through political dialogue or disputes (Foucault, 1972). The politicians in power use their control strategically to make further claims on citizens, taking this power to themselves, rather than viewing it as both cause and consequence of their dominance; thus, they destabilize transhistorical accounts, effectively rewriting history to suit themselves. According to Foucault, the function of discourse is not to conceal certain truths; it is simply that through its ontogenetic functions it constructs the worlds we live by and establishes the notions of truthfulness that we as communities of learners need to
work within (Foucault, 1972). The multiplication of its usage reflects the multiplication of its public spheres of practice. Power is generated through the activities of political leaders and their rivals, but we should be mindful that even though individual subjects become powerless in the sense that they become tied to a normalized ideal, they also subscribe to this position in accepting the conditions of control and the views of knowledge so generated. People from the ‘audience’ are engaged in their own regulation: they place themselves under the authority of others in order to listen to the ‘political truths’ and to be familiar with powerful issues. When they see themselves to be under a power that is based on right, they feel themselves to be self-actualized individuals. They regard themselves as powerful and conscious in the way they articulate their political opinions (Foucault, 1977) when, in reality, they actually have become the subjects of political domination.

In Poland, the discipline in right-wing politics is mostly visible in the gatherings of political followers in Krakowskie Przedmieście Street, in front of the President’s Palace, and during other political meetings. Disciplinary power is exercised on the body and souls of political supporters of the right-wing PiS. It apparently increases the power of individuals as it renders them more energetic and forceful. Encouraged to become louder and noisier, they amplify their actions to be more aggressive and soldier-like (similar to basic training within the military). Power is generated through the political discourse of the leaders of the right-wing party and emerges among groups of other people — their followers — even as these followers are (consciously) manipulated to bring them (unconsciously) under political control.

Discourse analysis, following a Foucauldian approach, can enable a supportive process of change, as students work through issues they perceive to be problematic, deconstructing texts and exploring normative assumptions. Students can be encouraged to use Foucault’s guidelines to deeply analyse political discourses and examine how they can be enforced through language choice. They can focus on the processes of categorization and interpretation of the political language in the Polish press and TV interviews, interrogating the dominant political frames and disrupting the further promotion of unquestioned activities shaped by the right-wing party. Through presenting a discursive analysis and encouraging the students to adopt similar approaches, the course
leader can point out the skill with which the party leaders marshal their followers. It can be demonstrated how a following is maintained through certain forms of ideological discourse, such as highlighting how ‘our good things’ now apply, and how these contrast with ‘their bad things’, through denigrating the activities of past political rivals and insinuating that the prospective unknown people who may challenge in the future will be unsuitable.

Political leaders often use communicative and interactive practices to gain control over their audience and to consolidate shared views through reference to ‘bad things’. Circumstances like the treatment of refugees, or their ‘bad’ religious intentions, are invoked, often just to build an imaginary common enemy. Such political practice not only involves power, it also represents an abuse of power to enable what we may call ‘domination’. More specifically, power is so used to imply an (illegitimate) influence; false discourses are expounded to make others believe in the things that serve the interests of the political leader. Such illegitimate power may be enforced through pictorial means, through religious guidelines, and even supported by the mass media (currently governed by those in power). This kind of negative persuasion, which has bolstered political discourse through the power of oppressive language, can be disseminated in local communities where people lack the specific knowledge that might be used to resist this illegitimate manipulation. Well-known examples in contemporary Poland include the governmental and mass-media discourses around the Pro-Democracy Movement (KOD) and discourses about immigrants. Contexts are obfuscated, blurred, lost within political jargon. In differing circumstances, through political or religious persuasion which may be formally legitimate but is actually ethically negative, recipients are more or less manipulated to believe or do what is deemed appropriate. In making this claim, there are several crucial criteria. One is that people are being acted upon against their fully conscious will and interests, and another, that these processes are not fully visible, but concealed through issues like a fear of unconscious enemies or even simply through eloquence or political politeness. When truly visible, such objectives are clearly in the best interests of the manipulator, usually one of the political leaders, not the people on whom they are imposed.
The Methodological Framework

Why Foucault?

Informed by Foucault’s views on power (Foucault, 1977), colleagues and I considered the courses of action we could undertake that might overturn the system of domination that has grown up around and through contemporary Polish political discourse. The answer we came up with was to organize a course, one which would give students the opportunity to analyse the language of political discourse. The course could provide students with the insights necessary to understand its oppressive character by enabling in-depth investigation and interpretation of the language of the right-wing political leaders. Given the enslaving tendencies of all thought, all interpretation, all language used and all discourse, adult learners who took the course would be clearly prepared to confront and oppose political demands. In deconstructing political discourse, students would not merely illuminate the background to political power, but also feel more empowered because, aside from absolute passivity, opposition is the only choice that they have, the only response possible. Thus they are following Foucault’s (1985) suggestion that by opting for a form of permanent revolution, one that is continual and persistent in its pursuit of a political ideal and an ordered society, they are creating a community that is conscious of political manipulation and sees through the fake jargon used by those in power.

Why Critical Discourse Analysis?

In a seminal paper on Critical Discourse Analysis, Fairclough (1993, p. 135) offers a definition that aptly sums up why this is an appropriate methodology for researching political speeches. He describes CDA as an approach that:

[... aims to systematically explore often opaque relationships of causality and determination between (a) discursive practices, events and texts, and (b) wider social and cultural structures, relations and processes; to investigate how such practices, events and texts arise out of and are ideologically shaped by relations of power and struggles over power; and to explore how the opacity of these relationships between discourse and society is itself a factor securing power and hegemony.]
In a later paper, Fairclough (2015, p. 6) reminds us that discourse includes ‘representations of how things are and have been’ — a process that relates to how political leaders denigrate past leaders’ activities, and ‘imaginaries — representations of how things might or should be’. Polish leaders have recourse to imaginaries when they offer the people a picture of an idealized society, whether honest or contrived. Fairclough also informs us (ibid., p. 12) of three main forms of critique: ideological (the traditional pursuit of the social relations of power); rhetorical, where the focus is persuasion; and strategic critique, which considers how groups of social agents seek to change societies in specific directions. All three types have relevance for the current project but Fairclough believes that it is the last mentioned, strategic, that assumes ‘a certain primacy in periods of major social change’ and this exemplifies our intentions in establishing the university course and my ensuing research project.

Why Participatory Action Research?

A team of academics in Sussex in the United Kingdom established a Master’s course in participation, power and social change that sought to ‘facilitate the learning of action research as a way of working for change, embedded in practice’ (Pettit, 2010) by encouraging its participants to become aware of their own learning processes and how these connected with elements of social change. Theoretically the course drew on Reason’s (1994) triadic model of integrated learning at individual, group and community levels, as did the course that was set up in Poland. Like Pettit and colleagues, we too asked ourselves: ‘How can change agents develop the concepts, skills, awareness and capacities they need to generate knowledge and action with others in participatory ways?’.

Participatory Action Research (PAR) was described in the Pettit article as a useful tool. It is one equipped to take up the challenge presented by this ‘bad’ situation by drawing upon the rich liberating tradition of the adult education movement, its passionate commitment to equality and justice, and the practical skills to investigate reality in order to transform it. As an adult educator, I have found a natural fit between PAR and my understanding of the community development concept as a guide for creating community as a space for mutuality and
freedom; an inclusive and safe place to analyse the political language of
our main representatives. For me, PAR is a form of resistance to all forms
of control that limit our freedom to pursue a reasoned, compassionate,
committed and democratic knowledge base. It can be an antidote
to oppressive forces of the PiS president. This is in keeping with our
tradition of liberation in the adult education movement, which provided
fertile ground for PAR.

Research Methods/Frameworks

Frames of Reference

Druckman (2009, p. 2) distinguishes between frames in
communication (often used in politics and the media) and frames
in thought, which are ‘construed as consisting of the dimensions on
which one bases his/her evaluation of an object’, and can be either
emphasis frames (that offer substantively distinct considerations of say,
importance, issue or value) or equivalency (or valence) frames, that
‘typically involve casting the same information in either a positive or
negative light’ according to Levin, Schneider and Gaeth (1998, p. 150).
All these types have potential relevance for this research project.

Furthermore, Druckman introduces ‘availability’ and Pan and
Kosicki’s (2001) notion of ‘framing potency’ (which relates to ‘the
persuasiveness or effectiveness of the frame’), two factors that can
be used to describe the ‘strength’ of a frame (p. 4), which are also
important considerations in regard to this research. Also relevant is his
explanation (attributed to Kinder and Sanders, 1996, p. 164) that ‘frames
lead a double life’ for they are both ‘interpretative structures embedded
in political discourse’ (referred to as rhetorical weapons) and ‘cognitive
structures that help individual citizens makes sense of the issues’ (an
idea that aptly captures their effect on the audience).

Thus, FoR are perceived as relevant concepts in political discourse and
other political communication practices. Understanding which frames
are used to define specific issues in a specific context is a clue that helps
one to be well-informed in a political world. It is also a real challenge for
the researchers, thanks to the volume of text data, the dynamic nature of
language and the variance in applicable frames across issues.
A political discourse functions as a means of linguistic adaptation and realizes various pragmatic effects. Communication in a political environment is a dynamic process of mutual recognition of each other’s motivation, and its functions are many and diverse. According to Bayley (2004) political discourse is not only one of the mirrors reflecting the tendencies of discursive and social development but also one of the tools endowed by language to enable political users to satisfy their communicative needs in the short term of mass-media effect and in the longer political term in contributing to survival, an outcome of successful adaptation. Linguistic choices are made dynamically and are negotiable; the discursive texts of politicians vary greatly in terms of complexity.

There are many issue-specific frames that span policy issues. As Henderson (1994) states, we can focus on economic frames (the costs, benefits or financial implications of an issue to the individual, family, community or the economy as a whole). Alternatively, politicians may adopt morality frames (a perspective that is compelled by religious doctrine or interpretation, duty, honour or any other sense of social responsibility), or draw on notions of fairness and equality or inequality frames (applying laws and/or punishment to control individuals or groups). Politicians may manipulate through rhetoric to seemingly ‘balance’ the rights or interests of one individual or group compared to another; or use security and defence frames to protect the welfare of a nation (sometimes from a threat that is not yet manifest). Moreover, they assume the importance of safety and quality-of-life frames and these are strongly connected to policies that determine an individual’s wealth, mobility, access to resources, ease of day-to-day routines, access to healthcare and whether communities thrive.

Otieno (2016) claims that political discourse is full of different speech actions, which can be seen to have a direct, relevant impact on political communication through truth claims, commands and requests, promises and blaming, and these can be especially visible in certain contexts and will vary with conditions such as the power or status of the politician and the style of language used. In fact, the role of the speaker — the politician as an authoritative narrator or a decisive actor — is crucial.
Language as Metaphor

Henderson (1994) describes metaphor as the ‘use of language in which what is said is not literally what is meant’ and explains that it is this ‘almost understood but not quite’ quality that creates the tension that makes it forceful (pp. 344/5). It provides ‘imaginative power to create meaning’ and in so doing can ‘shape and extend what can be said through comparisons and associations’ to provide ‘emotional impact’ and to paint strong verbal pictures of ideas (p. 354/6). Thus, metaphors are a key tool for political figures. Indeed, it is important to reflect not only on what is actually said but also that which is left out. As Henderson (p. 357/8) stresses, ‘a rhetorical awareness of what it is that is being suppressed by the metaphor can be as important as an understanding of what is being expressed’; both strategies can mislead or clarify, create false hope or realistic expectations, confusion or understanding, and this is easily manipulable.

People use their knowledge of actions and emotions to build both complexity and understanding within the fields of politics, science and economics. Cameron (2003) and Carston (2010) both stress the importance of metaphors to the cognitive re-evaluation that took place in the twentieth century, and both analyse the ad hoc nature of concept construction in fields like the environment and socio-economic space, and their relevance to the field of education and the positive or negative mental images of contemporary adult learners. Their separate narratives build on Lakoff and Johnson’s (1980, p. 153) work, and the notion that ‘metaphor is primarily a matter of thought and action, and only derivatively a matter of language’. They acknowledge that the human mind has the ability to conceptualize abstract ideas in terms of sensitive and particular experiences and widen the range of interests that humans can structure through metaphor. Their approach to metaphors in everyday life clearly connects with theories of framing both in the field of public communication and in the scientific area of economic acts and the decision-making process.

In relation to frames, individual metaphorical expressions become features in conceptual maps that link generic thematic domains. These serve as sources of meaning: source domains (for instance, ‘crisis’ and ‘good change’) link to abstract target domains (for example, ‘society’
or ‘economy’). Lakoff and Johnson (1980) identified three kinds of metaphorical concept that correspond to types of non-metaphorical concept:

1. orientational metaphors give concepts a spatial orientation (for example, the only correct way to make progress is by walking forwards);

2. ontological metaphors enable us to create bounded categories from things that are not discrete entities, in effect to contain them (for instance, social change, the Polish nation, the economy, are all container metaphors);

3. structural metaphors allow us to transfer structures associated with one concept to shape the way we understand another (for example, if we say that the economic crisis is a war, we can apply terms like fight, beat, blow up to embellish our discussion of the economy in ways that will be understood by others).

The Research Framework

The PAR project was based on a course that lasted one academic year, but course scheduling limited the time frame to one academic term, within which six cycles of research were planned. The aim of this research was for students to gain the ability to identify and describe different types of meaning using a linguistic, semantic and pragmatic methodology within a framework of political discourse. Moreover, students would study and discuss a range of methodological articles that would then enable them to discuss and critically analyse contemporary political material of national significance to Poland. The student participants decided to analyse the texts and contexts of the leader of the right-wing party currently in power, his speeches and interviews as leader presented on television news broadcasts or in daily newspapers. They chose, particularly, to take material from the programme ‘Warto rozmawiać’ (‘It is worthwhile to talk’), broadcast on TVP 1 (national government television), as well as selected articles published in ‘Wsieci’ (‘Network’), a weekly online magazine.
Additionally, the co-researchers (the adult learners who participated in the university project) suggested tracking the tone within each section of text in a political speech. They focused on linguistic devices such as figurative speech and metaphors, including some rhetoric and persuasive political pathos. Overall, it was decided to categorize sections of text as positive, negative or neutral in tone but acknowledged that such classification was subjective and would vary according to the issue being studied and the individual researcher’s viewpoint. However, through carrying out a pilot — the collective analysis of the immigration codebook — the group were able to establish some basic ground rules for effective categorization.

The Research Process

The adult learners were teachers in their mid-forties from small towns in western Poland who enrolled at university to gain new professional qualifications, following PiS reforms to the educational system. They chose the course on political discourse from a number on offer to them and were well aware of the bigger political picture. They wanted to gain more theoretical knowledge of rhetoric and biases and sought to co-create a safe learning space in which to study these issues. They were highly motivated, well organized and could cooperate together in the project’s tasks, aware of the need to ground them in an understanding of specific political contexts. Furthermore, they wanted to improve their translation skills. Indeed, I found their collective driving force gave the action research project impetus, helping me to complete the project within the timeframe of the academic course.

The research started propitiously, with the adult learners finding in Foucault’s work an appropriate theoretical framework for the analysis and interpretation of the data. Their encounter with Foucault’s theorizing on the constitution of the subject not only shaped their way of thinking during the next steps of the research, but it also allowed them to sort the voluminous corpus of data they had gathered into a manageable structure. In this respect, the Foucauldian perspective already described and the use of PAR and more specific methods evolved in tandem, each supporting the other.
The students needed to gel as a group in order for the course to be seen as a safe space, so it was reassuring for them to find that they all strongly disagreed with the negative attitudes expressed towards contemporary problems around migration and refugees’ lack of status in Poland when they carried out their pilot study. They felt that immigrants and refugees were portrayed in an unsympathetic manner, so those with immigrants as in-laws were particularly disappointed or upset when reading this political discourse.

Rooted in Foucault’s analytic approach to social processes of knowledge construction, our study and research examined the process of national identity construction as revealed in a series of practices within the context of adult learning and formal education. Several stages of data analysis were undertaken to make sense of formal adult education practices, and how they reveal students’ construction of their national selves. Foucault’s theorizing on the constitution of the subject was integral to a critical reading of the data, an iterative process where both I and my students — the adult learners — were moving back and forth through emerging themes and patterns.

Our application of Foucault’s theories meant that the process of national identity construction in the context of education was viewed as neither a passive reproduction of dominating structures, nor a manifestation of free will, but as the constant interplay between the two, revealed through a set of practices during the course. This approach to the analysis of socio-political processes is articulated by Foucault as the interplay of various technologies and was conceptualized in our study as the interplay of structure and agency.

Students, the adult learners who participated in the research, agreed that the effectiveness of the politician’s frames depends on the mass public’s reaction to his claims. But, in turn, the successful communication of a frame depends on whether the politician’s claims and arguments reach the mass public. Thus, the students sought to establish how this well-known right-wing leader transmitted rhetoric directly to a national audience through the major television network and the extent to which he chose words, arguments, and symbols favourable to his political position and likely to resonate among members of the mass public, gathered in the street. Students wanted to know how language was used strategically to strengthen public support.
A related line of work maintains that a political actor forges connections between issues and other ideas by developing joint frames of reference in the communication process. To analyse this requires close observation of the words, emotional phrases, images, and styles of presentation that a speaker uses when relaying information to another. In our analysis we found that the leader disseminates ideas by building frames of reference, selecting and highlighting events or issues, and making connections among them so as to promote a particular interpretation, evaluation and, finally, solution.

The power of frames of references rests not simply on the issues or values the politician mentions, but more concretely on the words used. As language is crafted to link policy issues to supportive values and political ideas, we can examine the usage of strategic terms and the associations between them. Above all, when frames are used to change media coverage and create or maintain massed public support, the character of the communication strategies will be manifest in the structure of the rhetoric. If the media and general political discourse mirrors the structure of the frames in communications, this demonstrates success in communicating a frame regardless of the whether the media values or disagrees with the ideas. It is easy to imagine that journalists might challenge rather than praise issue frames, and such unfavourable coverage would likely limit a frame’s effectiveness in affecting public opinion. However, such negative coverage would still be consistent with successful communication, because any coverage foregrounds the leader’s ideas and political concepts, establishing their place within the mass public’s mindset.

The adult learners who participated in this action research speculated that the right-wing political leader would use many rhetorical devices (such as persuasion, metaphors, and repetitions) in the practice of manipulation. What is more, they perceived that the use of symbolic and imaginative language would be emotive, successfully stirring up the feelings of the audience to magnify any negative images towards their political opponents and their former acts of governance. The learners, therefore, determined to study the linguistic tools available to the leader and, consequently, to study the political discourses to see how language was used and what devices enabled it to play an oppressive or coercive role.
The research found that in Poland, the politicians and political leaders did indeed construct their political visions through metaphorical devices, suggesting that such rhetorical and figurative resources are, in consequence, relevant, perhaps essential, to politico-economic thought. Tensions between abstraction and concreteness, intuition and logical thinking, form cornerstones when developing the ability to establish connections with society, particularly with a public audience. From this perspective, metaphors are very useful tools for the improvement of ‘economic storytelling’, promoting notions of economic success without implementing solid financial strategies or sociological devices of measurement.

In both ‘national’ TV coverage and the daily press, the adult learners easily identified specific structural metaphors and spheres of meaning that function as source domains and, furthermore, established their visible association to a variety of target domains held by the PiS. When presenting news about their opponents and, indeed, EU organizations, crisis metaphors are frequently employed. Some examples include: ‘one giant scandal’¹ in reference to the Polish judiciary (see Rzeczpospolitka, February 2017); ‘a new big hate attack’² in a speech to those gathered in front of the Presidential Palace in Warsaw to mark the 85th anniversary of the Smolensk disaster (see Niezależna, May 2017); ‘a life of constant threat and control’³ discussing the threat of terrorism (see wGospodarce, June 2017); and ‘Warsaw has reached the bottom’⁴ at the PiS regional convention in Warsaw (see onet, September 2018).

Many of the examples of figurative speech, as in those cited above, addressed the issue of universality through the use of conceptual metaphors and an undertone that was consistently pejorative. Most focused chiefly on promoting the ‘right’ social change, and on repairing a ‘ruined’ Poland after taking hold of the ‘steering wheel’ to drive through the political minefield.

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1 Rzeczpospolitka is a legal daily newspaper website.
2 Niezależna (meaning Independent) is a Polish news website.
3 wGospodarce is a professional news portal.
4 onet is a much-cited web portal.
As well as these conventional studies of the media’s use of economic crisis and social change metaphors, some adult learner-researchers paid attention to the visual representation of conceptual metaphors, which portrayed government decisions as emergency measures needed to rebuild a ‘ruined Poland after the elections’ or the ‘EU crisis’. Here, too, the portrayal of crisis unquestioningly indicated what was right and what was not right in the latest political decisions that were made by former political leaders, and included hints of concerns around Europe.

Examples from the Research

In keeping with the fair-use rule, we present analyses of short excerpts from texts here and point out that, as part of the course, these excerpts have been translated from Polish into English. However, even such short excerpts contain a significant range of linguistic attributes that imbue political discourse with the power to muster followers.

Text One

‘Change will not come if we wait for some other time. We are the ones we’ve been waiting for. We are the good change the Polish nation seek.’

Jarosław Kaczyński, leader of the PiS, establishing the ‘Good Change’ slogan of the 2015 election.

Kaczyński talked about just one thing, change. This shows that focusing on a single message reinforces it and makes it memorable. The speech informed the audience that this change was good and that it was the thing that they sought. Yet the prospective change was left to the imagination; change was merely a linguistic metaphor connected to something new and better; something that would bring the audience ‘a better political world’.

Persuasive pathos was used as a rhetorical device to appeal to the audience’s emotions, to trigger an emotional response, too. The passage of time was introduced, to present a strong argument for the necessity of making the decision to change a very fast one. The metaphor of time was very persuasive, demonstrating a formidable effort to convince the audience.
Like many politicians, the leader tried to influence his audience, to convince them that his party is the one that everyone is looking for. He does this by linking to the change metaphor: ‘we are the good change’ that Poland needs. There is an implication that anyone seeking a good change will find it within this political party rather than others and the language used expressed great confidence that this political party embodied the good change that Poles have waited for. Anaphora in repetition was used both to attract people’s attention, ‘We are the ones... We are the good change’, and to further reinforce the message.

It should also be noted that this speech appears to paraphrase — and thus to nationalize — Barack Obama’s campaign speech of 5 February 2008: ‘Change will not come if we wait for some other person or if we wait for some other time. We are the ones we’ve been waiting for. We are the change that we seek’. The similarity raises questions of intentionality. Was this merely a lack of originality, an unintended adoption of ideas in the public domain? Was it a deliberate borrowing of a rhetorically attractive claim, even an attempt to take on a cloak of ‘justice’ despite different political leanings? Or was it simple coincidence?

Text Two

‘If you are walking down the right path and you are willing to keep walking, eventually you will make progress.’

Jarosław Kaczyński, April 2017, Wikiquote from the Smolensk meetings.

Kaczyński advised the audience to walk down the right path and to continue walking in that direction in order to make progress. The meaning of the metaphor ‘the right path’ was unequivocal without giving detail, being only as informative as was necessary to express certainty. This was a clear, brief and orderly political discourse.

The metaphor of the only ‘right path’ as the ‘right course and trodden way to follow’ has deep roots in the Old Testament’s historical records, its description of the people who were moving forward thanks to God’s guidance. Moreover, such words were very relevant to contemporary concerns because they imply a clear route to progress, demonstrating

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persuasive reasoning. The excerpt used repetition to enforce its message. The text was eloquent and this, itself, is one of the most prominent, political weapons, as leaders well know. We felt that this excerpt was trying to convince the Polish audience that the ruling party represents the right path, the one that should be followed by all others.

As with text one, this excerpt also reflects a speech of Barack Obama’s, again raising questions as to whether this was deliberate and if so, for what purpose? On the internet, the attribution to Obama is recurrent but the actual speech not specified. It is claimed that ‘If you’re walking down the right path and you’re willing to keep walking, eventually you’ll make progress’ was part of the Farewell address in Chicago Illinois on 10 January 2017 (see Barack Obama: Quotes to live by. London: Carlton Books, 2019, p. 79) but this has proved difficult to verify.

Text Three

‘Our opponents are troublemakers. They are just trying to get legitimate power again. It is obvious, when they speak to us they show their treacherous mugs [faces]. We can clearly see their manipulation. The Pro-Democracy Movement is an example of the political minority held by our opponents.’

Jarosław Kaczyński, April 2017, from the Smolensk meetings.

The language of this speech was more oppressive in tone, probably intended to undermine the opposition. Political opponents were denigrated when their faces were referred to as ‘mugs’, their civic leaders as power-seeking and manipulative, which implies insincerity. Not only does such language feel oppressive and arrogant but there appears to be little concern that it may come across in this way. Such behaviour implies self-confidence, a certainty that one’s words will be appreciated by the audience and will neither destabilize one’s leadership nor disturb one’s legitimate political position. Indeed, ‘we can clearly see’ implies a position of superiority.

The orator positioned the opponents’ intentions as bad ones, even treacherous ones, and emphasized that they no longer held legitimate power. He also suggested to the audience that his opponents were politically marginalized, unable to return to power. If these opponents were to be insincere towards the people, they might be willing to rule
again but they are not necessarily interested in the good of Poland in the future.

It is not spelt out in the excerpt quoted here, but it is relevant to note that claims that the opponents are ‘treacherous’ commonly relate to the premise that public protest damages the country’s public image, creating a negative perspective of Poland within the field of the European Parliament and European Commission, and indeed the wider world.

Text Four

‘Communists and thieves, all of Poland is laughing at you.’

These comments were directed at those who participated in the public demonstrations to protest against one of the contested reforms, the de-legalization of the rights of the Constitutional Court; we believe that they disclosed a neglectful attitude towards political changes in the legacy of direct election to the Court.

Analysis of the speech lays bare an attempt to convince political supporters that their opponents are aligned with the ‘bad’ things that date from communist times, so they cannot be treated as true political rivals. The credibility of the protestors has been undermined by calling them ‘thieves’ because in Polish society the communists are viewed as criminals, bandits and robbers who were willing to sell Poland for ‘red cents’ and whose behaviour and greedy attitudes were compared to Judas, the treacherous disciple. Thus, by excluding the untrustworthy, the phrase ‘all of Poland’ implied that everyone else (deemed trustworthy, in contrast, irrespective of their different characteristics and origins) stood united with the ruling party that legitimately held power.

Overall, we have shown that the Polish leader used several different types of rhetorical device to deliver his messages. It is apparent in the excerpts that he favours the persuasive appeal of ethos and pathos. In addition, there is an imaginative use of language in his political discourse and a reliance on a type of repetition, anaphora. Thus, the texts appeal to the audience’s opinions and attitudes through the use of manipulative power and strive to keep the communication process effective.
Conclusion

The length of time at university and the environment within which the course took place crucially impacted on the success of this project, enabling adult learners to open up and offering them powerful opportunities to experience real learning. Given the potential fragility of the space for political debate, experiential learning and learning-by-doing are key factors in enabling the critical analysis of political discourse and the oppressive political language that is presented in the mass media in Poland.

These adult learners follow the social changes and the rumours of economic crisis in Poland every day, but they can now observe the reality with conscious intent and do not easily agree with the rhetoric, or get drawn in by the sometimes seemingly empathetic style of ‘the only right, national’ TV. As researchers, adult learners established their own right to disagree and to create concepts that embrace diversity and acknowledge multiple perspectives. They are able to address different levels of society simultaneously through the research: the national, the local, the translocal and the global, in which change is relegated to what is excluded or included in the national context. They, the adult researcher-learners, are the best equipped to grasp the nuances of political complexity. They have become a cutting-edge group of young social scientists, able to present their points of view without hesitation. On the political stage, their role is that of spectators, individuals who listen closely to political discourses and interviews with the leading politicians.

Yet, to borrow a phrase from Shakespeare’s As You Like It, if ‘All the world’s a stage, and all the men and women merely players’, we should consider if it is the politicians who are ‘merely players’. Is it the leaders who are continually acting, albeit without screenplays or scripts of acceptance and tolerance; seemingly forgetful that their ‘lines’ should be about the future of the country, the pursuit of a flourishing economy and plans for positive social change? This is not best achieved by commenting on the folly of the past and relying on linguistic devices that capitalize on people’s fear of the unknown to maintain political power.

That Polish society has radically changed of late goes without saying, but it is seldom truly acknowledged. Poland is sometimes
labelled as the nation without a memory, or more accurately by certain Polish sociologists as a ‘society of non-remembrance’ (Czyżewski in Czyżewski, Kowalski & Piotrowski, 2010) or ‘society which is addicted to seduction’ (Kowalski in Czyżewski, Kowalski & Piotrowski, 2010). However unfortunate, the past, and our memory of the past, is ever present; close analysis reveals it to be clearly visible in the prevalence of crisis metaphors and clearly demonstrable in the adult learners’ reflections and viewpoints. Their greater awareness of political falsities and realities is manifest in many ways, demonstrating the value of both the university course on political discourse and the participatory action research project. As with the English course, in Poland we challenged the ‘conventional views of policymaking [that] usually see “research” as a specialized activity which makes objective data and analysis available’ to those in power (Pettit, 2010) and agree with Pettit (ibid., p. 820) that:

> Knowledge, policy and practice are co-created through an emergent process of action and learning, often including some form of critical reflection and reappraisal of the norms, values, and assumptions by which we make sense of things, as well as an understanding of how these are shaped by power.

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